

To Be Real or Virtual? That is the Question...

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Abstract This editorial describes a crossroad that many plastic surgeons face when they have to decide how to manage their career.

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When I finished my plastic surgery training 16 years ago, my only wish was to be a famous surgeon's assistant. By doing that, I wanted to (1) acquire experience and learn more with someone older, and (2) receive a fair revenue by doing something it took me years to learn. We weren't in a hurry...

However, the world has changed and so have people and their goals. I believe a significant part of junior plastic surgeons (who recently finished their residency) don't think like that anymore. They want more, much more. And they want it fast. They want to be the chief surgeon from the start. And their earnings must come with fame. And they must be fully booked.

Once I read an article in PRS written by Dr. Rohrich which said: "The evolution of plastic surgery in your practice is much like your life. It is not a sprint, but a marathon! We must learn to pace our personal and professional growth." [1]. This sentence got stuck in my memory since then.

The rise of social media made that strategic vision change radically [2]. In the virtual world, anyone can be whoever they wish. Surgeons who have just passed the board of plastic

surgery hire a media guy and they create profiles, pages or something else and start building their "online reputation". Everything must be dumped on digital platforms to bring up this successful busy plastic surgeon image. There are Facebook pages with 20,000 likes from junior surgeons and pages from acknowledged respected surgeons with 100 likes. Going to a meeting? Take a picture showing you were there. Attending a conference of a famous guy? Don't forget the picture with the subtitle: "Updating... knowledge with Dr...". So far, so on. And the worst is that we, more experienced, find ourselves with similar attitudes...

So, what's the correct answer? To be real: learn on the surgical field with experienced surgeons, travel around the country or the world to learn techniques with the best like Pitanguy and many others have done? Study more and more until your plastic surgeon career finally takes off and you'll be recognized scientifically and financially? Or to be virtual: Create an online reputation and nurture this digital version of yourself until it's bigger than the real one?

I believe there's a middle ground. You may have a solid and consistent career, reaching top positions and you can do your digital medical marketing in an ethical, responsible way. It's part of our world these days. There's no problem being someone in the virtual world as long as you're also real.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest This author has no financial interest in any of the products, devices, or drugs mentioned in this manuscript.

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